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SUBJECT: BAGHDAD SADRISTS LIKELY TO WIN NEXT PROVINCIAL
ELECTION

REF: A. A. BAGHDAD 1588
[1](#)B. B. BAGHDAD 1552

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Charles O. Blaha,
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This is a Baghdad PRT reporting cable.

[1](#)2. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: Provincial elections in
Baghdad,
if run as a single-district party-list vote, will most likely
result in a Sadrist-dominated provincial government. Baghdad
moderates believe Sunni citizens in Baghdad would be better
served if electoral changes allowed for open-list and multiple
-district voting; these changes would help to moderate
Baghdad's
new Provincial Council (PC) members, and prevent extremists
from dominating provincial politics. Provincial elections
using an open-list, district-based system can make a
significant
contribution to political stability in Baghdad.
END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

2005 Elections and Future Projections

[1](#)3. (U) The current Baghdad Provincial Council (PC) was
elected in January 2005 during the same election that chose
the Transitional National Assembly (TNA). Voter turnout was
58% of the roughly 3 million registered voters in Baghdad,
but lopsided: 78% of those voters were Shia, because Sunnis
boycotted the polls. Shia parties won large majorities in
both the TNA and the Baghdad PC. The Shia coalition won 140
out of 275 seats in the TNA. In the provincial race, a
SCIRI/Badr coalition won 28 out of the 51 seats on the PC, a
Da'wa coalition won 11, Fadhila won 6, the NDA (Kurdish
coalition) won 2, the Communist Party won 2, and 1 al-Bayan
candidate and 1 National Independent Cadres and Elites (NIC&E
(Sadrist)) candidate won seats. No major Sunni parties won
any seats and there is only one ethnic Sunni Arab
on the PC -- one of the communists.

[1](#)4. (U) The December 2005 elections produced Iraq's national
Council of Representatives (CoR) with a composition that
demonstrated some Sunni electoral gains, some secular losses,
and left Shia-party dominance intact. Of the 59 seats of the
CoR allocated for Baghdad province, 34 went to parties of the
United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), the coalition of SCIRI,
Sadrist,
Fadhila and Da'wa; 13 seats went to the Sunni Iraqi
Accordance
Front; 8 seats went to Allawi's Iraqi National List; and 4
seats
went to other parties. The percentage breakdown of the 3.7
million votes cast in Baghdad in December 2005 resulted in
58%
to the Shia coalition, 19% to the Sunni coalition, 14% to

the secular coalition and 9% to other parties.

Sunnis Would Gain, Sadrists Would Gain More

15. (C) If elections for a new Baghdad PC are held in the near future under the same single-district party-list system employed in 2005, the major Shia parties would likely win roughly 30-31 seats (approx. 60%) of the PC. Sunni parties would likely win 10-11 seats (20%), giving other secular and independent parties the remaining 20%, also about 10 seats. While Baghdad's PC would likely see minor changes in its composition, it would undergo major changes in its politics. The major variables involved in determining the future politics of a new PC include the extent to which Sunni participation increases over the turnout of 2005, and the relative strength of the different Shia parties.

16. (C) Sunni participation was encouraged throughout 2005 and increased dramatically from January to December due to voter registration drives and a concerted effort to expand the number of polling sites present in the outlying rural communities where many Baghdad Sunnis reside. However, Sunni electoral increases will not exceed their population percentage -- most estimates put Sunnis at between 20-30% of the

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province's population. In addition, Sunni leaders have expressed concern that the Sunni vote will be reduced if large numbers of Sunni internally displaced persons (IDPs) are not allowed to vote.

17. (C) It is highly likely that Sadrist candidates will make up the bulk of any new Baghdad PC, displacing other Shia parties. Moqtada al-Sadr denounced the January 2005 elections and did not overtly support any parties (although a Sadrist-affiliated NIC&E candidate holds one seat on the Baghdad PC). Despite this apparent absence, many PC members who ran on Fadhila and Da'wa tickets now ally themselves with the Sadrist Movement. While SCIRI maintains the major leadership positions in Baghdad (Governor, Mayor and PC Chairman), known Sadrists now hold all the major deputy positions, including Deputy Governor, Deputy Mayor for Municipalities and PC Deputy Chairman.

18. (C) In addition, Sadrist party organization has reportedly improved, according to local leaders in Baghdad, and will likely result in significant electoral gains in future elections. SCIRI leaders on the PC have admitted that they will be challenged by Sadrists for control of provincial government in the future, and Sadrist leaders have expressed confidence in their electoral potential. When asked about the minority status of Sadrists on the PC, Deputy Governor Qassim N'ima told PRToff that that situation "would be changing someday."

19. (C) Given these trends, it is possible that Sadrists

could
win more than 20, and possibly even 30 seats on the Baghdad
PC.
Because the council generally relies on a simple majority
vote
to take decisions, a party only needs 26 seats to dominate
the
council.

¶10. (C) If Sadrists make significant gains in the provincial
elections, they will make it more difficult for USG officials
to work with the Baghdad Provincial Council. The Sadr City
District Council is under orders from Moqtada al-Sadr not to
engage directly with Coalition or Embassy personnel, and
other
provincial Sadrists have told PRToff that they have been
ordered to restrict their interaction with PRT and other USG
officials. A Sadrism-dominated PC would likely cease contact
with most, if not all, USG entities and dictate that all
other
municipal and local government bodies in Baghdad follow suit.

The Moderating Effect of Open-list, District-based Elections

¶11. (C) Baghdad moderates have told PRToff that changes to
the electoral system may not necessarily help moderate
candidates win seats, but will have a net positive effect on
provincial politics by moderating those who do win. Former
Baghdad Governor Ali Fadel al-Misir suggests changing from a
closed-list to an open-list ballot. Under a closed list
system, voters pick a party, not a person; they do not know
the candidates for whom they vote, and elected officials
become more accountable to party bosses than to voters,
according to al-Misir. He says that Baghdad has sub-standard
politicians leading it because party leaders select them
behind closed doors, instead of citizens voting for them in
open elections. Al-Misir believes that closed-list ballots
allow parties to put extremists in office.

¶12. (C) Faisal Shuber, an independent Shia council member
from
Istiqlal, was chosen by the largely Sunni Regional Council to
serve as its deputy chairman. Sunnis from the outlying
suburbs
have struggled to connect with the provincial government, but
Shuber told PRToff that many of them do not support the major
Sunni political parties and would see a few seats on the PC
as
nothing more than symbolic. Shuber said that designating PC
members to run in and represent specific geographic districts

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would better serve the public. There is no guarantee that an
IIP representative will care any more about Abu Ghraib than
someone from SCIRI. But, Shuber argued, a PC member elected
to
represent Abu Ghraib would more likely care about Abu Ghraib.

Shuber launched a political party to run in the December 2005
elections that drew from Shia and Sunni independent local
council members. Other moderates like Shuber and al-Misir
have told PRToff that district representation on the PC would
make politicians more responsive to citizens and less likely
to pursue an extremist agenda.

¶13. (C) Sunni leaders have expressed concerns that a large
number of Sunni IDPs would not be able to vote, especially in
Baghdad. A well-thought out plan that attempts to cope with
IDPs both in Baghdad and outside Baghdad will be necessary
regardless of the electoral system used. For IDPs within
Baghdad,
keeping the entire province as a single electoral district
would make population shifts between districts irrelevant in
a

final provincial vote tally, but would eliminate the opportunity for district-based elections. Moreover, if people do not feel safe enough to move back to their homes, they may not feel safe enough to vote.

District-Based Elections Would Diminish Sadrism Influence,
But Take More Time

¶14. (C) District-based elections will likely diminish the extent of a Sadrism victory, because the system ensures a geographic distribution of seats. The Sadrists have very concentrated population centers and would thus lose a significant advantage through a system that dissipates the strength of their base in Sadr City. Districts with large Sunni populations may achieve representation that would otherwise be overwhelmed by Shia turnout across the province. This electoral system would also provide a powerful incentive for the Provincial Council's new members to respond to the concerns of their districts' residents instead of to their political parties. This would be a significant contribution to political stability in Baghdad. However, district-based elections would likely add more months of preparation to register voters and prepare residents for the new system.
END COMMENT.
CROCKER